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# Leveraging Evaluation to Carry the Message – How the Arts Can Demonstrate Indispensability

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## ***Leveraging Evaluation to Carry the Message – How the Arts Can Demonstrate Indispensability***

**Paul Lorton, Jr.<sup>1</sup>**

University of San Francisco

### **Summary**

In economically difficult times it is important for the Arts to make the case that they are as indispensable to the broader society as “schools and roads.” Evaluation can be a major tool in this effort.

How that can be done by Arts organizations in achieving their desired goals to survive while delivering their unique gifts to the culture is crucial to both.

The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the issues involved in the role of evaluation in informing the broader society of the role/success arts organizations have in achieving culture preservation and enhancement while, at the same time, fulfilling the needs and desires of their funding sources. While generally discussing examples from various types of arts organizations, the focus will be on the performing arts richly amplified with examples from opera companies.

### **Introduction**

At a time when the need to fund roads and schools seems paramount in reinvesting in the nation’s recovery, it is of pressing importance that the Arts make the case that they are a part of society’s infrastructure. As one might expect, much of the re-invigorated government funding of the arts through the stimulus efforts does involve careful attention to stating then documenting the achievement of goals set for the impact of the arts activity on society. Other funding sources, including the critical “donor pool,” will follow this lead. Thus an evaluation direction and avenue for results that was once desirable now becomes indispensable.

As some evidence of this priority for evaluation, the language of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Public Law 111-5) and its direction for the Arts, while focused on job preservation in the Arts, suggests outcomes of the funded programs are to be more broadly focused.

On the obvious jobs priority is this quote from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) description of the grant program:

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Illustration is *Aeneas tells Dido the misfortunes of the Trojan city*. Oil on canvas, 1815 Baron Pierre-Narcisse Guérin

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The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Public Law 111-5 ("Recovery Act") recognizes that the nonprofit arts industry is an important sector of the economy. The National Endowment for the Arts is uniquely positioned to fund arts projects and activities that preserve jobs in the nonprofit arts sector threatened by declines in philanthropic and other support during the current economic downturn.<sup>2</sup>

However part of this initiative is the very clear call to measure how well the funded activity will achieve the goal not of job preservation but of the art's organizations' "artistic and public service goals." To quote again:

The outcome the Arts Endowment intends to achieve through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is: *Organizations enhance their ability to realize their artistic and public service goals.* Within the context of this outcome, we ask all applicants to define what they would like to achieve, how they will assess the degree to which it is achieved, and, upon completion of the project, what they have learned from their successes and failures.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, at the highest national level the policy set for funding priorities appears to include evaluation focused on the cultural contribution of the funded organization. Evaluation that stresses the Arts contribution to preserving, sustaining and enhancing culture seems desired.

How Arts organizations are doing this sort of evaluation and can do it is the principle focus of this discussion where examples are drawn mostly from the classical performing arts (Symphony, Ballet, Opera). As a practical matter and to give this discussion a useful detailed focus, the most in depth information is from organizations dedicated to presenting Opera. Opera has some unique advantages when it comes to contributing to culture preservation. One current advantage is that it is popular and that popularity is increasing as major companies find ways to increase the exposure of a broader public to the art form. It is also a performing art form that includes many others under its umbrella – music, staging, singing, acting. Also, Opera stories are exciting.

### **Contributions of Opera to Culture**

To focus on one art form and its continuing contribution, one need only list a few of the recent contributions to the American/English repertory. In its derivative way, each of the operas named has come from another medium but the transformation into an opera has highlighted a part of the drama of the work to make it more vivid for the audience.

2000, 2003 Jake Heggie – *Dead Man Walking*, *The End of the Affair*  
 2006 Ned Rorem – *Our Town*  
 2007 Ricky Ian Gordon – *The Grapes of Wrath*  
 2007 Philip Glass – *Appomattox*  
 2007 Robert Aldrige – *Elmer Gantry*  
 2008 Stewart Wallace – *The Bonesetter's Daughter*  
 2009 Richard Wainwright – *Prima Donna*  
 2009 Andre Previn – *Brief Encounter*  
 2009 Richard Danielpour – *Margaret Garner*

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<sup>2</sup> [www.arts.endow.gov/grants/apply/recovery/index.html](http://www.arts.endow.gov/grants/apply/recovery/index.html)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

It is the task of art to enrich our lives, give us insight into our selves and our world. That each Opera staged over the last 400 years has accomplished this for someone can be assumed but demonstrating that impact for a societally critical group is the challenge. Later in this discussion how to accomplish this will be addressed for this is the key to gaining support for the arts especially in times when support has many calls on its resources.

There was a time when the rich who also controlled the state, funded the arts. At that time there was little one needed to do to justify the funding other than be in the funder's list of needed culture. The relationship between Ludwig II of Bavaria and Richard Wagner is well appreciated and it is unlikely that Wagner's career would have been as long and successful had not Ludwig supported him out of a personal appreciation for his talent (Wagner's operas famously appealed to the king's fantasy-filled imagination).

Beyond such relationships between the crown and the arts, it was felt to be an obligation of the rich and privileged to make sure the rest of us were lavished with activities for the "common good." No less a benefactor that Andrew Carnegie, in his essay on "Wealth," stated the manner in which cultural enhancements to the community should be supported:

There remains, then, only one mode of using great fortunes; ... It is founded upon the present most intense individualism, and the race is prepared to put it in practice by degrees whenever it pleases. Under its sway we shall have an ideal state in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense, the property of the many, because administered for the common good; and this wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if it had been distributed in small sums to the people themselves. Even the poorest can be made to see this and to agree that great sums gathered by some of their fellow citizens and spent for public purposes, from which the masses reap the principal benefit, are more valuable to them than if scattered among them through the course of many years in trifling amounts.<sup>4</sup>

## **Temporarily Troubled Times**

These are difficult times for a lot of people and activities all over the world and one cannot summon the lavishly privileged to support the arts without question. That not-for-profits also participate in this economic downturn is not surprising, except, perhaps to those organizations in the worst straights.

However, troubled economic times happen with irregularity but with certainty – there were problems in 2001, in the early 1990's, in the early 1980's and so on. That these economic "down-turns" happen periodically is not shocking; that people are surprised by it may be!

### ***Small Business Failure***

Businesses fail for a number of reasons. The easy reason to give is "no money" but that to readily obviates the need to find causes and culprits susceptible to remedies. It is known that money is neither the simple nor simply the cause. As the Small Business Administration's site states:

Research indicates that poor planning is responsible for most business failures. Good organization - of financials, inventory, schedules, and production -can help you avoid many pitfalls.<sup>5</sup> Poor planning and, by inference, inadequate management are usually the real causes. But

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<sup>4</sup>Carnegie, Andrew *North American Review* (June 1889). Reprinted in *The Annals of America*, vol. 11, 1884–1894 (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968), 222–226. (available on [historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5767/](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5767/))

<sup>5</sup> [www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/plan/getready/SERV\\_SBPLANNER\\_ISENTFORU.html](http://www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/plan/getready/SERV_SBPLANNER_ISENTFORU.html)

successful management in this information age can be built on that information. The discussion following this introduction is designed to give some insight into how the arts organizations (particularly Opera companies) can manage better and point to one sort of information upon which better management can build.

### **Arts Organizations in Difficulty<sup>6</sup>**

In the past year or so a several opera companies have folded their tents and closed their doors, more or less. This is always a bit sad but a readily appreciated warning to others about the perilous nature of survival in the not for profit arts realm. Looking at their demise and at the saving of others can help us understand the process and plan for successfully withstanding the economic winds.

#### ***Opera Pacific***

Opera Pacific was a fairly large organization. In the Opera America scheme, they, along with two of the others discussed below, Baltimore and Orlando Opera companies, were in the second tier of professional organizations (Level 2 -- \$3 million to \$9,999,999).

During its 23 seasons, Opera Pacific established itself as one of the finest professional opera companies in the nation. Opera Pacific's main stage productions, extensive community outreach programs, and energetic Guild Alliance combined to create a cultural resource for Southern California. More than 670,000 people enjoyed Opera Pacific's productions at the Orange County Performing Arts Center, while over 575,000 young people discovered the world of opera through the company's in-school presentations, Student Previews, and nationally recognized Opera Camps. In addition to the "grand opera" repertory, Opera Pacific responded to the need for strong, professional productions of classic American musical theatre and European operetta.<sup>7</sup>

One of the striking things about the demise of Opera Pacific was the community reaction to the event that, in some ways, came as a surprise to the community. Here are a couple of comments posted to the Orange Country Register site after November 4, 2008, article announcing the closure appeared

Here's a problem. Let's tackle it! Let's keep what we have, because we may not ever get another chance again! It happened with our Classical radio. We lost one station before we saw the light and coughed up our pennies to support the survivor. Please, give us a chance to keep this going, Opera Pacific! I'll buy more tickets! I'll walk my neighborhood with flyers. I'll talk to college music students. I'm awake now! Let me help! (11/5/2008 12:19:47 PM)

This is almost unbearable news. No,no,no. We need Opera in our lives - the beautiful music, the talented Opera singers, the costumes, etc. How could this possibly happen in such a wealthy part of the Cal.? This is truly a very sad day for Orange County and Opera Pacific. (11/5/2008 8:09:39 AM)<sup>8</sup>

#### ***Baltimore Opera***

Similarly Baltimore Opera had a solid position among opera companies. Last year it closed its doors in the usual way by cancelling the rest of its season and all but disappearing. From their

<sup>6</sup> In this discussion, Opera companies are featured. Other arts organizations have similar shoals to navigate and will feature in revisions of this discussion.

<sup>7</sup> [www.operapacific.org](http://www.operapacific.org)

<sup>8</sup> Mangan, Timothy "Opera Pacific closes down, likely for good" *Orange County Register* November 4/5, 2008

reconfigured web site comes:

Thank you for visiting **BaltimoreOpera.com**. The Baltimore Opera Company closed its doors in 2009, leaving Baltimore without a grand opera company. While this has been a tremendous loss for Baltimore opera fans, patrons and the city at large, there are other exciting options to experience opera in the area. This site is devoted to promoting opera in the Baltimore Metropolitan area as well as keeping you up-to-date on any exciting developments that will bring grand opera back to our city.<sup>9</sup>

They are, in fact, staging Concert Operas (Operas without sets and, perhaps, costumes but with singers and an orchestra) as is the follow-on to the Orlando Opera that left the "main" stage at the end of April 2009.

### ***Orlando Opera***

Orlando Opera Company, one of the oldest arts groups in Central Florida, will suspend operations April 30.

The 51-year-old company is a victim of lower ticket sales, reduced contributions and defaults on pledges, said Jim Ireland, the company's president and CEO.

The group announced three weeks ago that it could not continue if it did not raise \$500,000. A recent three-week fund drive brought in only about \$25,000, spokesman Andy Howard said.

"The lack of broad community support indicates that a resident professional opera company is not a priority of Orlando in these difficult times," said Joy Barrett Sabol, the opera board's chair.<sup>10</sup>

A couple of weeks before the plug was finally pulled, the Orlando Sentinel published a glowing review of the last opera, as it turned out, produced by the company.

In the wrong hands, "verismo," the late 19th-century Italian operatic tradition that offered "truth" with earthy characters and raw passions, can sometimes seem like little more than a bad soap opera set to music. But the movement toward naturalistic plots included a multitude of possible approaches -- on Friday evening, Orlando Opera showed just how wide-ranging and effective "verismo" can be ... the real stars of this opera were the members of the Orlando Opera Chorus, who were, as always, very well prepared by chorus master Robin Stamper, and who collectively sang several of the more memorable tunes of this opera.

[...]

Perhaps the evening's best news is that there were no visible or aural signs of Orlando Opera's current financial difficulties. The bad news, however, is that those problems -- should they continue -- could mean the end of a worthy company that helps to give Orlando a reputation as more than an over-sized theme park. Improved attendance at the remaining two performances would not hurt the Opera's fundraising efforts.<sup>11</sup>

### ***San Francisco Lyric Opera***

In a more gradual sinking, San Francisco Lyric Opera has suspended operations. Low attendance and failure to raise the additional funding needed to support the operation contributed to a falling off in focus which resulted in a couple of unproductive efforts to 1. increase exposure

<sup>9</sup> [www.baltimoreopera.com](http://www.baltimoreopera.com)

<sup>10</sup> Maupin, Elizabeth "Orlando Opera to suspend operations April 30" **OrlandoSentinel.com** April 16, 2009

<sup>11</sup> Warfield, Scott Review: Orlando Opera's chorus is the real star of this double bill This "Suor Angelica" and "Cavalleria Rusticana" show what "Verisimo" opera can be. **OrlandoSentinel.com** April 4, 2009

(hiring a PR person which came to naught) and 2. raise funds (a tentative effort to organize a Gala). The following notice was posted on the company's web site:

To All Donors, Patrons and Interested Parties

San Francisco Lyric Opera regrets that, there being no reasonable prospect of funding sufficient to mount a 2010 season of productions, it is suspending performance activities forthwith including our November event.

Being determined to once more present opera at prices that more people can afford and to serve young children, as we have with 25 productions over 8 years, the company is embarking on a drive to recruit a slate of new, active Board members, to obtain funding commitments from new donors and to seek out a leader, all with a view to recommencing performances in 2011.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Other San Francisco Bay Area Opera Companies***

There are healthy local opera companies. Several are surviving in the San Francisco Bay Area of California, one the states with especially high unemployment, great impact of the mortgage crisis and reshuffling of the labor force. Each of these companies has done an especially good job of planning and communicating.

#### ***Opera San Jose***

Opera San José is a professional, regional opera company that is unique in the United States. Maintaining a resident company of principal artists, this company specializes in showcasing the finest young professional singers in the nation. Featuring fresh, new talents in the first years of their careers, Opera San José's performances are always dramatically stimulating and vocally accomplished.<sup>13</sup>

By configuring its enterprise to reduce fixed costs (e.g., owning various facilities purchased in the early days of the 30 year old company) Opera San Jose has only had to make relatively minor cost cutting moves to maintain its full schedule.

#### ***Festival Opera***

Festival Opera performs in a regional center with a summer mounting of, usually, two fully staged productions and some events during the year.

After nearly two decades, Festival Opera remains committed to bringing professional opera productions at affordable prices to residents of San Francisco's East Bay communities. The third-largest opera company in the Bay Area, Festival Opera is a showcase for talented young artists.<sup>14</sup>

This year, the Festival Opera board made a special commitment to continue to fully stage their summer offerings rather than down scale and was rewarded by well-attended productions of Turandot and Gounod's Faust.

#### ***Livermore Valley Opera***

Livermore Valley Opera has moved into a new theater in the last couple of years increasing the strain on its resources.

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<sup>12</sup> [www.sflyricopera.org](http://www.sflyricopera.org)

<sup>13</sup> [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org)

<sup>14</sup> [www.festivalopera.com](http://www.festivalopera.com)

Livermore Valley Opera was founded in 1992, and presents fully-staged operas at the Bankhead Theater in the spring and fall. The theater we call home is located in the Tri-Valley area, just 45 miles east of San Francisco. Our wonderful "opera house" features excellent lines of sight and acoustics, helping us attract talented singers and stage directors. We combine the talents of professional musicians, stage directors, principal singers, and designers with the dedication and practical abilities of volunteers filling such critical roles as board members, chorus, stage crew, and set builders to reach our artistic goals.<sup>15</sup>

By constant communication with its community and through keeping its costs low but production values high, Livermore Valley Opera has, thus far, minimized the impact of reduced resources.

### ***West Bay Opera***

West Bay Opera has been staging operas for over 50 years

West Bay Opera has the loyal support of a large contingent of opera lovers throughout the Bay Area. The company performs to an estimated 5,000 audience members per year, and the company's Opera In The Schools (OITS) program reaches an estimated 20,000 schoolchildren, from Daly City to Santa Cruz. Most of our audience members live on the San Francisco Peninsula, although many come from Sacramento, the Monterey Peninsula and even further.

Tickets for performances are less than one-third the cost of similar seats at the San Francisco Opera, and parking is free. Season subscriptions are available and guarantee prime seating for productions. West Bay Opera encourages the attendance of young audiences, students, and seniors by offering tickets at reduced prices. Before each production, West Bay Opera brings outreach performances to schools, corporations, shopping malls, community centers, colleges, universities, and retirement communities.<sup>16</sup>

As with Livermore Valley Opera, West Bay Opera is keeping close control on its expenses and is in constant contact with its patron/donor community.

### **Some Recent Salvations**

#### ***Magic Theater***

The Magic Theater has been in San Francisco for over 40 year and has persevered through various levels of difficult and prosperous economic times. Just as so many not-for profit performing arts organizations have felt, the current downturn caught them in need. They appealed to their community and were rewarded.

Magic Theatre, San Francisco's 42-year-old troupe that prizes risk over commercialism, has announced on its website that it is \$600,000 in debt and will shut its doors Jan. 9, 2009, unless it raises \$350,000. The debt, "combined with sharp declines in earned and contributed revenue due to the global economy, place us in imminent peril of shutting our doors," according to a Magic statement. The not-for-profit troupe is now "in the midst of a staff shutdown" and "may be forced to cancel the remainder of its season and close for good."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> [www.livermorevalleyopera.com](http://www.livermorevalleyopera.com)

<sup>16</sup> [www.wbopera.org](http://www.wbopera.org)

<sup>17</sup> Jones, Kenneth, "San Francisco's Magic Theatre Is in Peril; Will Close Without Cash Infusion" **Playbill.com**, December 30, 2008



By January 13, 2009, the group had raised \$450,000 from about 1,100 donors in their loyal community and survived to mount another season and face the future more robustly than without this experience. The Santa Cruz Shakespeare Company, having announced its dire circumstance at about the same time was able to produce similar results.

### ***Santa Cruz Shakespeare Company***

Faced with challenges on several fronts including large budget cuts in state funds to University of California, Santa Cruz, the Santa Cruz Shakespeare Company was compelled to raise a very large amount of money in order to continue offering its productions to the public. The community responded:

SSC raised \$419,000 in December after it was announced that the company would have to raise \$300,000 in a less than two weeks to continue its annual season in 2009. Funds came from more than 2,000 individual donors throughout Santa Cruz County and nationwide, with the majority of gifts in the \$25 to \$100 range.

"What has been wonderful about this season is that so many different people deserve credit for Shakespeare Santa Cruz's success," said Yager [David Yager, dean of the Arts Division, University of California, Santa Cruz], "including Arts Division staff, Development staff, Shakespeare Santa Cruz, the community, all the people who bought tickets (including faculty and staff), and the many financial supporters who donated from all across the country, and as far away as Italy..."<sup>18</sup>

### ***Bitterroot Performing Arts, Hamilton, Montana***

The Bitterroot Performing Arts Council was formed in the summer of 2009 to raise funds to replace the underwriter that had funded the performing arts series since it began in 1996.

The council received its non-profit status six weeks ago and has been fund raising ever since. A recent Salsa Night fundraiser brought in \$10,000 in a single night. The initial plan called for bringing seven shows to the Hamilton Performing Arts Center, but Barnings said the group decided to scale that back by one. "We decided it was fiscally responsible to do six this year and be here again next year," she said. "We didn't want to risk being in the red at the end of the year." Nationally, only one-third of performing arts series funding comes through ticket sales. The rest is raised through sponsorships and donations. The council asked the community to step forward and help. "The community has spoken and spoken well," Barnings said. "They wanted this to happen and we're going to make sure that it does." <sup>19</sup>

How does this give us insight into the demise of the Opera programs? While it may be more expensive and therefore lead to higher ticket prices in the staging of Opera over other live performances, that is not a given as opera can be staged for as little or as much as one has the resources to accomplish. The main difference is the degree to which the community to which the organization looks for support will provide that support.

In the salvaged examples above, sums that would have supported comparable opera companies were sought and raised. On the other hand, Orlando Opera sought \$500,000 and raised \$25,000.

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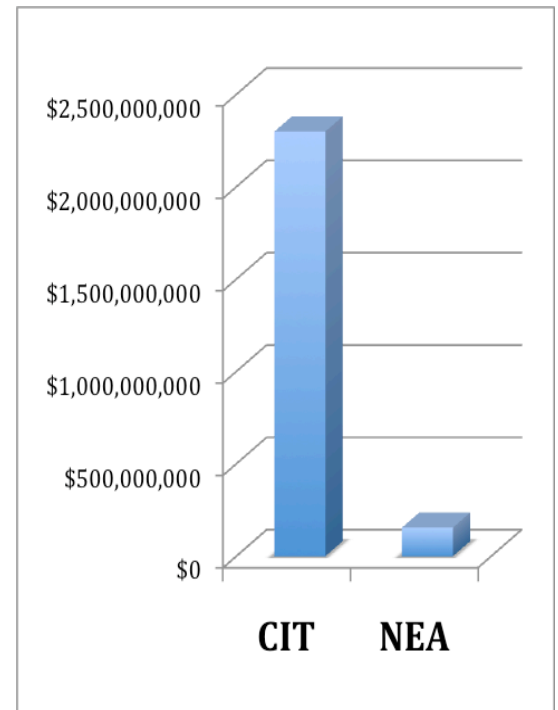
<sup>18</sup> [www.ucsc.edu/news\\_events/text.asp?pid=3283](http://www.ucsc.edu/news_events/text.asp?pid=3283)

<sup>19</sup> [ravallirepublic.com/articles/2009/09/02/news/news69.txt](http://ravallirepublic.com/articles/2009/09/02/news/news69.txt)

## An Aside on Worthiness

There is, also, a larger question on the worthiness of arts organizations for support. In the halcyon, but not lamented, days of King Ludwig and Andrew Carnegie, the benefactor bestowed his largesse out of a personal bias toward the art. No further justification or information was needed. It was a capricious way to fund but an easy way if your organization was the grantee.

It is a more rational process now but does need greater effort. So how do the arts appear to the public – as an expensive and superfluous activity only marginally worthy of support? For this next step, we can look at what sorts of organizations get really large amounts of money. For this we can look at CIT Bank, one of the many banks unsuccessfully bailed out in the current spat of efforts to salvage financial institutions. \$2.3 billion was poured into this organization with mixed results – one of which is that the money is gone. The magnitude of this investment is informative especially when compared with the current, increased, NEA budget of \$155 million



How does one failing financial institution receive about 15 times the money from the US Government as all the Arts programs in the United States? One answer is that the bank was deemed more important to the country than the Arts. How can we influence that perception?

The arts have to be shown to be just as indispensable to the nation (and the world, in due course) as financial institutions (or any other program seeking funds).

## Manifestations of Indispensability

There are many ways to show indispensability. Certainly the public outcry when you go under is one way – although a bit drastic. Moreover, the corollary proof of the need the community had for you is that you are replaced shortly after your demise. We saw this sort of postscript to the final act for a couple of the opera companies lost in the past year.

### *“Important to the community”*

The claim is often made that the arts are important to the community in many ways – as a source of employment for the chronically underemployed artistic workforce, as a source of needed enrichment and diversion in times when many diversions are not rich in culture.

### *Enhance the quality of life*

The Arts and Quality of Life Research Center promotes research, training, and innovative programs that demonstrate the unique role of the arts in making a difference in people’s lives. To this end, it focuses on exploring uses of various creative arts to enhance human functioning,

*developmentally, intellectually, psychologically, socially, physically, aesthetically and spiritually*<sup>20</sup>.

## **Dimensions for Evaluation**

Financial downturns will occur. The wise business plans for this and controls current efforts with an eye to the inevitable the rainy day. With that in mind, how can one forecast the weather, anticipate the rainy day? Some of the activities in forecasting the weather can also be used to secure the second point raised by the failures and salvations – keeping the community informed. This topic then brings us to the issue that began this discussion – how evaluation can demonstrate the indispensability of the Arts.

One way is to make good on the claims of the web sites to arts being good for the community. On its web site, Eugene Opera, over 30 years old, suggests solid community support from donor contributions and strong attendance and suggests some concrete ways in which it will be of value to the community.

EUGENE OPERA has enjoyed considerable community support, as evidenced by its consistently strong attendance numbers and private donor support. In addition, it enjoys the backing of numerous public and business supporters, some of which include the Oregon Arts Commission, Molecular Probes, KeyBank and Union Bank of California. These financial commitments have enabled EUGENE OPERA to set its sights higher, to further educate current and future audiences and to exert a greater influence on the future of the art form.<sup>21</sup>

Knoxville Opera has a similar litany of ways in which it is valuable to its community and worthy of support:

What does giving to Knoxville Opera accomplish? ...

You contribute to the revitalization of downtown Knoxville. The Knoxville Opera Rossini Festival Italian Street Fair brings tens of thousands of people to downtown to enjoy dozens of performing arts groups, a variety of artisans and food vendors, and to contribute to the local economy.

You make Knoxville a better place to live and work. Companies and families like to locate here because we are a culturally rich community. By supporting Knoxville Opera you also support the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra as we are their largest employer.<sup>22</sup>

Almost all opera companies make claims similar to these that, while demonstrable, are seldom taken to that next step until a crisis occurs. Yet for two reasons, they should be demonstrated before the inevitable crisis arrives: 1. they inform the community that the arts are integral to the quality of the community's life and 2. they can provide feed back on the health of the arts organization's community support before the crisis appears.

## **Indicators**

As these citations from opera companies attest, audience attendance and donor contributions are important indicators of the how well the community is supporting the organization. Some of the quantitative items that can be assembled to monitor the support in the

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.temple.edu/boyer/ResearchCenter/index.htm>

<sup>21</sup> [www.eugeneopera.com](http://www.eugeneopera.com)

<sup>22</sup> [www.knoxvilleopera.com](http://www.knoxvilleopera.com)

community are Ticket sales, Event attendance, Donors, Donations, Press Coverage, Volunteers, requests for information, special events, tours, etc. All can help quantify over time how well the organization is linked with the community and whether it has become “too important to fail” just as Magic Theater and Santa Cruz Shakespeare were.

### ***Press Coverage***

Press coverage, whether in the traditional print media or the newer electronic, web-based forums (e.g., blogs, FaceBook) is a vector through which the community can be exposed to the arts organization and by which the organization can measure the community’s interest before direct measures such as Season Ticket sales are available. Some of the items which might be covered by the media and which will provide opportunities to monitor include: Performances, Season announcements, coverage of special Events, and coverage of News about the organization. In assessing the contribution of the coverage to delivering the message it is useful to assess whether the coverage is part of public awareness building by the organization (PR) or simply coverage of novelty.

### **Next Steps**

To be polite, one must close with some recommendations and not leave the participant hanging in the air wondering what to do next. There are three areas where the present analysis seems clear (a matter of opinion to be sure but...): indicators, measures and efforts to gather more insight.

#### *Focus on Better Indicators*

Are there better indicators than the simple items listed? When the listed indicators have been well studied and their contributions defined, the next step can be taken. The indicators listed in the preceding section, including media coverage, need to be refined and developed. Once some knowledge and experience has been gained with the usefulness of these “low hanging fruit” measures, other indicators which have strengths where these measure are weak can be pursued.

#### *Collect Reasonable Qualitative Measures*

Some of the quantities to be measured were suggested but more focused measures perhaps can directly assess the degree to which claimed indispensability is perceived in the community.

#### *Storm Chase*

Storm Chasing can be an exciting and useful part of the evaluation scheme for bringing indispensability into the tool set of the arts. As was done here in looking at four groups that have suspended their effort and three organizations that weathered this crisis well, we gained insight, knowledge and a more informed approach to the next case by trying to see what went wrong. As Marc Scorca’s quote, with which we end this discussion, illustrates, we know where to find the next storm.

Orlando’s opera company will be the sixth professional company to go under or declare bankruptcy in recent months, said Marc Scorca, president of the service organization Opera America. Others include companies in Baltimore; Hartford, Conn.; Orange County, Calif.; western Massachusetts; and Augusta, Ga. “We have not lost a company that was healthy at the time the recession hit,” Scorca said before the Orlando group announced its decision. “Companies that entered it in a state of fragility just haven’t had any place to turn.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Maupin, Elizabeth, “Orlando Opera to suspend operations April 30” **Orlando Sentinel** Apr 16, 2009

## Bibliography

## Misc Material

In his often quoted (in this case by the SBA) 1983 book *Small Business Management*, Michael D. Ames Emeritus Professor of management at CSU Fullerton gives the following reasons for small business failure:

- Lack of experience
- Insufficient capital (money)
- Poor location
- Poor inventory management
- Over-investment in fixed assets
- Poor credit arrangements
- Personal use of business funds
- Unexpected growth

<http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/11.20.03/symphony-0347.html>

At the opposite end of the programming philosophy advocated by Granger is Marin Alsop, whose Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music has won widespread support playing exclusively new or rarely heard 20th-century works. Alsop notes that the major concern during the 1938 concert season in America was aging audiences and the fear that there would be no replacements when they died off, effectively dooming classical music itself.

Since that exact issue continues to cause anxiety among today's music lovers, 65 years later, one wonders if it isn't a red herring. "It is a simple reality that people tend to develop an appreciation for classical music later in life, so older listeners will always comprise our core audience."

Alsop sees herself as an ambassador for classical music, whether old or new. "I do a ton of public speaking; present a series of talks at the local bookstore; am a consistent presence on our local public radio station." She has enjoyed growing success with her efforts on, as well as off, the podium, including round-table discussions with living composers.